

# GRANDEUR OF THE GREAT COMMISSION,

A Discourse by

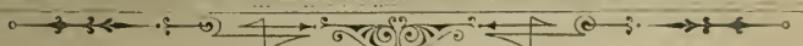
The Rev. E. P. Thwing, M. D., Ph. D..

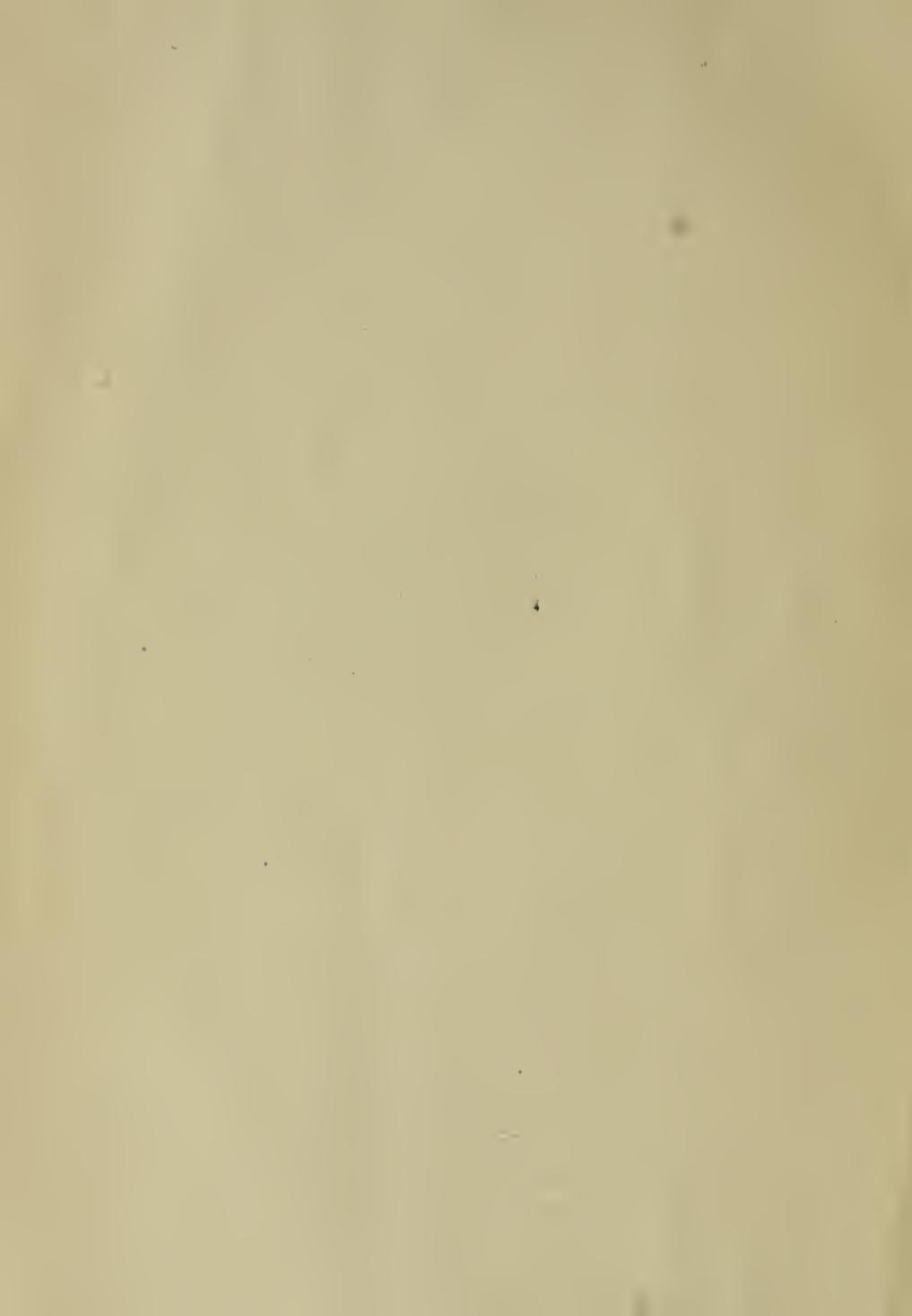
At the Ordination of his son.

At Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Brooklyn, N. Y.. May 1. 1892.

As a Missionary to China.





# THE GRANDEUR OF THE GREAT COMMISSION.

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*A Discourse by the Rev. E. P. Thoring, M. D., Ph. D., at the ordination of his son, Brooklyn, N. Y., May 1, 1892, as a missionary to China.*

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Go, disciple ye all the nations.—MATT. 28: 19.

Πορειθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

IN that most enchanting city of the Orient, the superbly situated Syrian capital, Damasens, the Pearl of the East—as it is the Mother of all cities on the globe—towering above its green girdle of groves and gardens, stands an ancient basilica, once a Christian sanctuary, now a Moslem mosque. Lavish hands once embellished it with Byzantine and Saracenic art. But it is not the costly columns of syenite, marble, and porphyry that lift its lofty dome, nor the scores of stained windows that carpet the pavement with brilliant hues that hold your eye so much as it is the memorials of the Crucified, seen in the Eucharistic cup and bread in bronze built into the great gate, with the Greek inscription cut into the stone lintel above, “THE KINGDOM, O CHRIST, IS THE KINGDOM OF ALL THE

AGES, AND THY DOMINION IS FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION." For twelve hundred years that sublime declaration has spoken to the world and still rings forth a more emphatic message than that which five times a day is sounded by the muezzin above it to the followers of the false prophet, whose strange indifference has permitted this eloquent witness to be heard so long. Here is a historic certification of the truth we are to study, that all power in heaven and earth is Christ's, therefore, we are to go forth and disciple all nations, assured that He, upon whose shoulders rests the government, will be with us "all days, even to the end of the world."

Our theme is THE GRANDEUR OF THE GREAT COMMISSION, in its source, its scope, its agencies and aim.

ITS SOURCE. From whom does it issue? By whom are we commissioned? By none other than the King of kings, by Him on whose head are many crowns. We go not forth on a personal errand, in a merely private capacity. We are "Ambassadors for Christ." We are Messengers of the Lord of hosts, under divine direction, under imperial protection. Kings are reproved for our sakes. They are warned not to touch God's anointed, and to do His prophets no harm, for he that touches them toucheth the apple of His eye. In the proclamation of our message we are to speak boldly, being by Him put in trust with the gospel which is to reconstruct human society, by its power bind princes, teach senators wisdom, make officers peace and exactors righteousness, so that kings may become wise and judges of the earth instructed, knowing that he who heareth us, heareth Him, and he

that despiseth us, despiseth Him that sent us. We are to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He hath commanded us, who is God over all, blessed forever.

This exalted conception of our vocation in its rational, ethical and spiritual functions is a vital, dynamic element in our estimate of available resources. He who reads his commission in the transfiguring light of these truths will preach no tame, attenuated version of the gospel, or in feeble, timid tones. The source of the authority we wield gives worth and weight to our words. Ours is an august and kingly calling. We ought, then, like Gladstone, to talk in italics.

THE SCOPE of our commission presents another feature of its grandeur. We are to disciple all nations, without reference to racial or other distinctions. Our field is coterminous with the globe, for we are to go into all the world, in every latitude and longitude, and publish good tidings to all creation.

Geographically, how wide, inclusive, comprehensive, covering all seas and continents! Historically, it is a continuous, perpetual jurisdiction, in force until the kingdoms of this world are Christ's; and sociologically, it is correspondingly pervasive, intrusive, bringing us not into the physical domain of each nation merely, but the law and truth of God into its language, thought and life, into all individual and social, moral and forensic relations; bringing everything face to face with the uplifting and recreating forces of Christianity. This breadth is what we should expect, for this commission is a transcript of the plan of God's remedial grace, the amazing sweep of which, in time and space,

is hinted at in Eph. II. and III.—“that in the ages which are to come He might show forth the exceeding riches of His grace” . . . “unto principalities and powers in the heavenly places, through the church.” Here is a cosmic relation between the earthly militant, and the heavenly triumphant, church ; and a historic relation between the beginnings of its life and the supernal glory yet to be revealed. Such a conception comes only from Him to whom nations are as the dust of the balance, and “from out whose hands the centuries fall like grains of sand.”

We often wonder at the mental obtuseness of Christ’s disciples, at their contracted views of His Kingdom, at their provincial pride as Jews, their impatient, imperious disdain of Gentile equality. But after nineteen centuries of Christian culture, do we not see the same intense prejudice of race, color, creed or clan ? There are arrogant collisions of hostile factions in church and state among ourselves, and a temper inhospitable towards the representatives of other civilizations than our own. Absorbed in petty, personal schemes and blinded by misjudgments, how can we rise to this divine outlook ? How can we appreciate the greatness of our opportunity and the dimensions of that work to which Christ calls us ? Sir William Hunter, speaking as a sagacious statesman, says that apathy in missions indicates a decline in national life. There is a worm at the root, a weakness at the heart. We need a corrective to the benumbing and belittling influence of our materialistic, selfish age. We get it here. The sublime possibilities and the urgent responsibilities before us enoble us by the ten-

sion to which they put our powers. Our faculties enlarge under the stimulus of grand endeavor. The higher our level, the larger our outlook, the nobler our culture. Cyrus educated Persia by the vastness of his schemes of conquest and Themistocles taught Greece, Alexander, Macedon by their gigantic plans. The Cyropedia of Xenophon is still a vivid romance to us after the lapse of twenty-three centuries. The English Reformation and the American Revolution shaped and moulded men as ordinary, humdrum affairs never would have done. So now in this centennial year, not of American history alone, but of modern missions, God's call comes with exhilarating emphasis to all of us, "Go, disciple all nations," beginning with, but not ending in, our Jerusalem. The scope, the grandeur of the idea should allure and inspire. Sleepy and sluggish indeed must be the soul who does not respond, "Here am I, send Me!" Awake, thou that sleepest! "*Act* your Iliad, leave others to sing it." You and I may now enter the field, aid God's struggling Church, and so contribute something to the history of this planet!

When the text was spoken, this hemisphere was unknown. Ptolemaic geography revealed nothing of two-thirds of the land of the globe, nothing of the 150,000,000 square miles of water covering the rest of its surface. The pillars of Hercules saw no Roman galley push its adventurous way westward, and the Hebrides were an Ultima Thule on the north. Britons had been conquered by Cæsar and some time afterward yielded to Christ. Augustine and forty missionaries then sought the Saxons, Columba, the Celts,

The latter—a contemporary of Justinian, and of Belisarius, the great general who re-established the supremacy of the Roman arms—made Iona “The light of the West.” It was a joy to me, many years ago, to stand where he trained his missionaries in those early centuries, where kings came to receive his benediction, red-handed men of blood to be pardoned, and where shrouded barges brought the dust of the titled and royal dead to rest on “Columba’s Happy Isle.” Standing by the holy abbot’s grave, it was a thrilling thought to recall the triumphs of the Cross since this Caledonian pioneer had fulfilled his commission and gone to his rest. Standing in that pilastered vestibule, Fingal’s Cave—where hymn of Druid, shout of Roman, prayer of nun and cry of sea-pirates have, in turn, mingled with sob of wind and roar of wave—I paused and lifted with others that ancient melody which has no equal, “Old Hundred,” to the words, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” which swelled and echoed through lofty arches, with a solemn yet jubilant sweetness which was indescribable!

The area covered by our commission to-day, and the vast populations to be reached, compared with those of Christ’s age, add features of almost appalling interest to the charge put upon us. Computations are made and diagrams are drawn to impress the mind with the stupendous magnitude of the work which confronts us. For example, it would take us five hundred years to give the heathen population of China, alone, a moment’s look, one by one; two thousand years to see the non-christian people of the

earth pass before us, giving up all the ordinary working hours of each day to the solemn inspection, without pausing for food or rest! Could life be extended to these limits, what sympathizing heart could stand the awful strain, if awake to the possibilities of human existence? No wonder that Jesus wept aloud as He forecast the fearful doom of one Oriental city. But the twentieth century opens with thirteen hundred millions of unchristian population for us to evangelize. The Captain of our salvation has all this time been calling for men and money. Many magnificent sacrifices have been made, enough to make the history of the Church illustrious. But how tardy our movements compared with the march of empire and the conquests of war. An English preacher once asked some British soldiers how long it would take to put a proclamation of the Queen before every creature in the world, the entire army and navy of the empire being put under marching orders. An old hero replied, "Well, I think we could manage it in about eighteen months." Constrained by the love of Christ, ought we to be two thousand years doing what military coercion could accomplish in a few months? Is the flag of St. George a more authoritative symbol than the Cross of the Crucified? If China could sweep Central Asia to-day with an army of twenty million—as it could, at the beck of the Dragon Throne and the vermilion penit—shall the Christian Church in the world, with its vast wealth and resources, be content to send to the mission fields a few stragglers, comparatively, with an appropriation, as now, of but *one cent* a year for the heathen world, per capita, then

continually cry in the ears of the fettered toilers, “Retrenchment, retrenchment; so much to do at home?” Dr. Gracey tells us, that after Protestant Christianity has used all it needs, given all it will, and wasted most wantonly, it yet has a reserve of UNSPENT fortune reaching the enormous sum of FIVE HUNDRED MILLIONS annually! This, too, where the urgency and promise of our great commission attracts the admiring attention of men of the world, who only look at missions as a most remunerative investment in its commercial and pecuniary returns. Charles Darwin, the naturalist, not a Christian believer, gave five pounds a year to one mission, for he had seen the field. He writes: “It is most wonderful and shames me, as I always prophesied utter failure. It is a grand success.”

Enough has been presented to show the grandeur of this undertaking, viewed in its geographical magnitude, its historic growth, its numerical proportions, and, above all, in its ennobling influence on individual and national life through the tension to which our higher powers are put by the command “Go, disciple ye all nations.” As a final feature we will briefly, as one, consider—

3.—THE AGENCIES AND AIM contemplated in this commission. That Christ should have put into human hands a work so stupendous as the conversion of the world, is, in itself, a startling thought. When we think of the apparent weakness of this unrecognized power of the gospel and its uncompromising attitude at the start, toward the venerable and formidable forces of heathenism, we are ready, with Dr. Storrs, to exclaim, “If ever a claim to power seemed absurd,

that was the one. A child offering to stop with his breath the blast of the tornado, and to hurl it upward into the air, would hardly have seemed more impudent in his challenge than did, to the accomplished philosophers of Rome, this new religion in the work which it undertook." But by "base things of the world, things despised, things that are not," God is bringing to nothing things that are. He uses material and moral forces. His truth is omnipotent. Its momentum and velocity increase every year. The splendid leaps of science in the discovery and application of physical forces are a type and prophecy of the accelerated movement of supernatural energies in these latter days. Therefore we may expect a more rapid evangelization of the world as a result, in the near future. This will necessitate a manlier, more healthful, heroic and aggressive life on the part of the church at home, an augmentation of personal power and holiness. These leading thoughts are embodied in my published discourse before the Shanghai Conference of 1890, and need not be repeated. The plowman is overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes the sower of seed. The branch of the Lord is growing more comely and its fruit more excellent. The supineness of the church, which Williams Carey's memorable sermon rebuked, a hundred years ago this month, and which evil lingers still, will be thrown off. One is yet to chase a thousand, two to put ten thousand to flight. God's wisdom is justified in His children. The East India Company said that the commission of Carey and his companions was "the maddest, most extravagant, most expensive, most un-

warrantable project that ever was proposed by a lunatic enthusiast." But this same mighty board of directors, who ruled more millions, says Dr. March, than the Cæsars in the height of their glory, this proud autocrat of India, a few years later, paid \$75,000 to print a dictionary which one these lunatic missionaries had made while hiding himself from arrest by their officers, who had been ordered to seize him and send him home to England. This company has been dead and buried for a generation, but the agencies they despised are proving themselves to be the power of God and the wisdom of God in the salvation of multitudes of souls. Is it not a quickening thought?

Christ gave the keynote in three words: PREACH, TEACH, HEAL. The aim is one, the agencies three-fold, Evangelistic, Educational, Medical. The salvation and upbuilding of mankind is the grand goal. We are to go into all the earth and preach the gospel. This is first and foremost. Then, we are to teach by the school, college, printing press and industrial arts. Then, following in the steps of the first Great Physician, comes the medical missionary. In no branch of the work has God's blessing been more conspicuously shown. Nowhere has the romance of missions been more wonderfully exhibited. Surgical skill triumphs where diplomacy fails and military force is useless. India was first opened to England in 1636 by the skill of one of her physicians who saved the life of a royal princess who was fearfully burned at Delhi; China by the lancet of Dr. Parker, and Corea by the forceps of Dr. Allen. As a member of the

British Medical Association—which includes leading physicians all over the globe—I was a witness, while in the Orient, of the work of some of them, and so am able intelligently to commend medical missions. They are directly antidotal to the distrust and dislike of foreigners felt by heathen. But aside from their direct ministry to body and soul, these men have enriched the accumulations of medical science, observing and recording the etiology and natural history of diseases peculiar to the East. The missionary physician has withstood the debasing influence of that sensual life which foreigners have introduced. They have maintained the purity of a profession honored at home, the sacredness of marriage, and taught the indispensable need of continence, the sanctity of womanhood, and the value of human life. It was America that sent the first woman abroad as an educated physician. In 1867 the first unmarried female missionaries were sent out by the American Board, in face of not a little prejudice, at which we now smile, as we do at the opposition which Howard Malcolm fifty years ago made to medical missions—in a book still reprinted—saying, “Christianity needs no such usher. The physician may throw his missionary brother into the shade,” suggesting that a few medicines and some simple book of remedies will suffice in most cases. Missions now are coming to be better understood: their administration a recognized science. We begin to see the need of systematic, instead of spasmodic benevolence: of the union of denominations practically one, for moral and economic reasons: of a revision of our domestic training and Sunday School

instruction with reference to the early development of missionary instincts; of higher qualifications for laborers, and of special lines of instruction in theological seminaries, also of having missionary literature, periodical and biographical, more generally introduced into our homes. The ~~grandeur~~ of this commission, seen in its source, its scope, its agencies and aim, is now beginning to attract our sons and daughters at home and the students of our academic and medical colleges to offer themselves for this service. The volunteer movement here and in Europe is prophetic; so, also, the departure of men and women—some of but moderate means yet strong in faith—who go forth at their own charges, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

May God visit this church with a revival such as that of 1866, in which it was born and from which it took its name, "Memorial," and many respond to this call "Go, DISCIPLE YE ALL NATIONS!" At a critical moment at the siege of Petersburg, which the eye of General Grant saw might decide forever the fate of the Union, the one repeated cry he gave was, "Pour in the *men*! Pour in the *MEN*! When belated soldiers were hunting for their particular regiments during the battle of Gettysburg, Gen. Howard exclaimed, "Fall in, fall in anywhere; *there is the enemy*, you can't go wrong!" Let not paltry sectarian differences divide and delay. Close up the ranks! There is the enemy, march! "Who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" Who is willing to say with Ittai, the heroic warrior who refused to leave David's side when danger threatened, "In what place,

my lord the King shall be, whether for death or for life, even there shall thy servant be."

MY DEAR SON! This is a moment of supreme interest to you, your parents, to this witnessing congregation and to a larger assembly unseen by us, who behold you with unutterable sympathy from heavenly heights as you now assume the vows of an Ambassador of Jesus Christ commissioned to a far off land. You are a child of many prayers. You are an inheritor of blessings through a long line of godly ancestors. Their benedictions with your Saviour's are falling on you in the hush at this holy hour. Our scattered household, separated by the breadth of this continent and by the river of death, are joined in thought and affection for you in this glad consummation of your one, long cherished aim of life.

The charm of David Scudder's brief missionary career, says Professor Phelps, "was due to the fact that he was born to it. He never had another choice of his life's work. He had no youthful aspirations to surrender. In after life he had no regretful memories. His whole history was cumulative toward one end. Hence the concentration of his aim, hence his joy in his work, the fascination of his sway over others and the resplendent promise of his manhood." We entered Andover Seminary as classmates in 1855, boarded at the same family, walked, talked, sang and prayed together. He builded into me and so touched you. His physical vitality, buoyant spirits, passion for study—particularly for Oriental lore—his enthusiasm for work, his love for Christ and for souls,—these

traits have of late been often recalled, as seen in my youngest son. Now I welcome you to the field which I must soon leave. May you live to verify the significance of your Saxon name EDWARD, "Happy Reaper," and garner many sheaves under those bright skies of Asia where you and your parents have already seen the fields white for the harvest, and where a warm welcome waits you from those who know and love you there.

GERTRUDE, MY DEAR DAUGHTER, stand up and take from my lips your parents' blessing, we who have reverently laid our gray hairs on the same altar which drinks the dew of our children's youth! Seventy-two years ago, your grandparents were under commission by the American Board. May the Apostolic Succession long remain unbroken.

Your name in German means *All Truth*. Be a jealous guardian of this jewel which Jesus gives you to carry to your Mongolian sisters, the truth as it is in Jesus. Be faithful unto death and He will give you a crown of life.

We do not say Good-by to you now, for we hope to go with you, but the parting hour must some time come. On the southern slopes of the White Cloud Hills, overlooking the crowded city of Canton, is a quiet cemetery where the dust of her missionaries rests. It is just as near heaven as Greenwood is, or Mount Auburn, where our loved ones sleep. Standing on those sunny uplands, within the sound of the monastery bells, I have looked across the shining

Pearl River before me, and thought of the Heavenly Gates of Pearl within which God's elect are

" Gathering homeward from every land,  
One by one, one by one."

Keep those gates, my daughter, ever in view, and some day, meet me there!

After prayer by the venerable Rev. Dr. Wells, the Rev. Dr. Nelson gave the charge. The following is an extract, as reported in the *Brooklyn Eagle*.

I am charged by my presbytery with the duty of ministering to you a little cheer and counsel. I have no special fitness for this task, save the melancholy advantage of years. I have to urge you to become what I am not, but am striving to be. I can only indicate the glory of which I myself have but caught the faintest and most distant radiance. The most that any of us may do is to point you to the bright summit from the far slopes, up whose beginnings we ourselves are painfully climbing. I do not bid you listen to me as to a teacher of an unapproachable sanctity, but rather as to a brother in experience, in infirmity, in struggle, in desire, pressed beneath the same sanctions, animated by the same hopes, reliant on the same Almighty arm.

The hour toward which you have struggled with intense longing has come, in which by the voluntary surrender of yourself and by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery and by the solemn consecration of the ordaining prayer you are put into the ministry. At such a supreme moment I cannot wish for you anything nobler or better than that you should

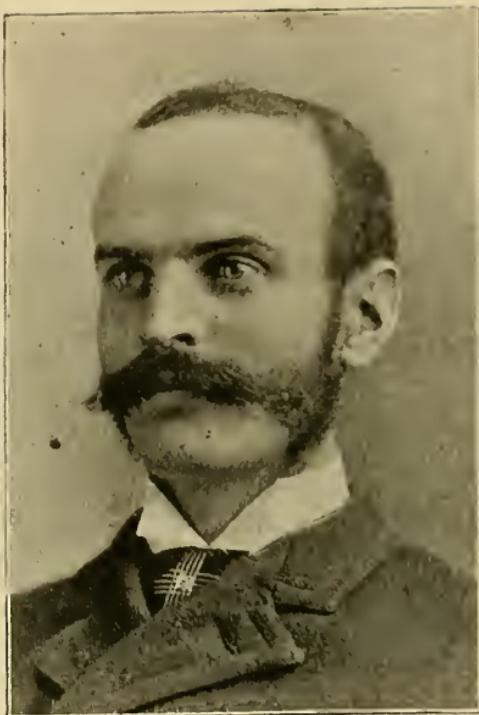
imitate the example and spirit of that servant of God, who, with his foot on the threshold of the ministry and his heart dilating with a great life purpose, exclaimed, "By all means I will save some; I may not be remembered for my brilliancy, for my scholarship, for the possession of commanding gifts or regal mind, but, God helping me, I will lead sinners to Christ; I will join with the penitent when his sighs burst into song; I will comfort the troubled soul with the consolations of the gospel; I will build up believers till their faith is strong as the promises of God; I will warn the wicked of the error of his way; I will seek to deliver myself from the guilt of blood."

That is a splendid ideal. Pray and strive ever more that in your personal experience it may become the actual. God honors a great and expectant faith. Covet earnestly the best gifts. Like your divine Master and Exemplar, seek always to think and speak and act on the loftiest and purest lines. The compensations of such endeavor will be marked and marvelous. A nature into which no unholy imagination can come will grow into the purity of Christ. A nature that never thinks a false thing will grow into the transparency and openness of Christ. A nature that lovingly performs acts of sacrifice for others will acquire rich and generous sympathies like the tenderness and compassion of Christ. And so you may pass onward, in an endless series of transformations, changed from glory to glory until you will stand before men a close and living copy of the Son of God. You enter your work enriched with the heritage of the missionary spirit and instinct. It has been in the blood of your

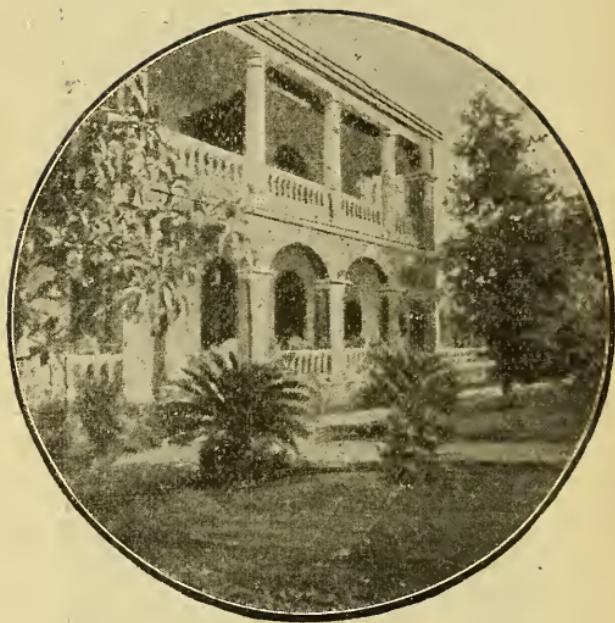
family for generations past, and bids fair to descend by heredity to generations yet unborn. Your grandfather, Thomas Thwing of sainted memory, was for more than thirty years a missionary among the unsaved of Boston, some of that time with God alone as his paymaster. To peruse his biography, and especially the glowing tributes to his memory, from many sources, is forever to set the mind at rest as to whether life is worth the living, and to feel the life quicken with new inspirations to duty and endeavor. The heroic spirit of such a man is a priceless heritage to the children's children of his children, since it may be said that the fourth generation of missionaries is represented now in the wee lad bearing the name of Edward Payson Thwing, and dedicated by his parents—members of this church—to a life of missionary sacrifice. Your father's words and work, together with his presence on this platform this evening, bear witness to his relation to the work of missions, and were it not for that quiet diffidence which shrinks at the mention of her name, my heart would constrain me to bear witness to the strong esteem in which your missionary mother is held by this church, and by that yet larger circle whose privilege it has been to share her acquaintance and friendship. Your brother, Dr. Clarence Thwing, as missionary physician, strengthened by the sympathy and coöperation of his wife, is at this moment laboring among the Indians of Alaska. Your sister has already received her appointment as missionary to China, and will share your joys and mitigate your discomforts by her presence in the same field with yourself. And

if, as your parents now expect, five out of your household go to China next September, we will have the unique spectacle of seven out of one family at work at once in the foreign mission field.

Dr. Nelson then congratulated the candidate on having already acquired a practical acquaintance with the Cantonese dialect, and with the missionary perspective, which is not less important. He insisted on the need of a broad culture on the part of each missionary, and quoted at length from *Ex ORIENTE* in reference to the present needs of the East, and the training of men for the work, closing with tender and cordial words of personal and pastoral benediction.



**REV. EDWARD WAITE THWING,**  
MISSIONARY TO CHINA.



**PRESBYTERIAN MISSION GROUNDS,**  
**CANTON, CHINA.**



